
BRYCE and the "N.P.B." Cancel – An Update

Edited from an e-mail from Dave Cooper (#1773)

"I finally retired in May 2005. Since I retired I don't know how I ever found time to go to work. I'm down to sorting the last few tonnes of covers, stamps, etc. Even began to find time to read stamp bulletins, magazines, etc... Just found our March 2005 *Bulletin*."

In that issue, Bob Szymanski presented the smallest stamp with a complete perfin with which he was familiar. The stamp was a Great Britain Sc#42, with a complete "BRYCE" perfined in it. However, what caught Dave's eye was the statement made in that note about the cancel: "I don't know what... the N.P.B. stands for..." Two subsequent notes in the *Bulletin* referred to, and attempted to unscramble this mystery.

In the May *Bulletin* John Randall (#1336) (p. 78) noted that the cancel referred to the "Newspaper Branch" of the Post Office, while Ron Wythe (#2586) suggested that it referred to the service – "NewsPaper/Bulletin." The former conclusion appears to be drawn from the classic cancel illustrated below which is found on British stamps of the 1860s and 1870s. However the presence of three periods in the abbreviation appears to conflict with

the obvious use of only two words. 'newspaper branch.'



Now we have another explanation for the cancel. The easy answer is that the N.P.B. stands for a service – **Newspaper Parcel Bookpost.** Citing an article in G.S.M. (Layne, H. 1999. Cancellations of the Newspaper Branch - Part 1. Gibbons Stamp Monthly(May): 39-41.) Quoting from the article:

... until 1855, after which the postage had to be prepaid and any newspaper posted in an open wrapper bearing a 1d adhesive stamp was obliterated with a 'killer' type cancellation in the London Inland Office, or a normal office cancel elsewhere...

When the 1870 legislation was introduced, newspapers up to a weight of ½ oz. could be carried by post for 1/2d...

Both the newspaper proprietors and the Post Office sorted the newspaper wrappers into Post Office Roads, and special cancellations were brought into use in 1870 for the purpose of cancelling these wrappers.

The first cancellor to show the N.P.B. were issued on December 21, 1870. This cancellor was circular and included (in addition to N.P.B.) the word "PAID" and a number between 1 and 12. Subsequently, scores of these cancellors were produced, some in brass were recorded by the Best Office and can be identified as to user, but many

others were hand-made and records about these cancels are scarce or non-existent.

Note that many of the illustrated cancels do not include a date (commonly used as pre-cancelling devices such that the date would be meaningless). And, Dave notes, in many cases Scotland had their own rules. In the illustrated cancel in the original article, the Glasgow cancel does include a date.

Below from the cited Gibbons article is a variety of these cancels, small relative to the total number known, but giving an indication of the wide variety of these items.

